

Let Me Dream by Anonymous

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Summary:

Four hours past midnight, Steve tumbles out of the bed, making his way downstairs to the persistently ringing phone.

1. Chapter 1

Four hours past midnight, Steve tumbles out of the bed, making his way downstairs to the persistently ringing phone.

He tiredly rubs his eyes with the back of his hand and yawns. His mind is a little fuzzy, like he's been woken from a deep sleep. But he hasn't. He's been wide awake, staring at the ceiling and trying not to think. He hasn't been sleeping well, lately.

The stairs are cold under his feet. He walks so quietly he can't hear his own footsteps. Through the window in the hallway, he sees the empty pool outside and the darkened forest. Steve grips his bat a little tighter, it's all clammy. The shadows are tall, the light from the street lamps doesn't reach them. He forces his eyes away and picks up the receiver.

"You've reached the Harrington's, this is Steve speaking." His voice comes out even.

On the other end of the line, only silence.

"This is Steve. Hello? Can you hear me?"

The hair on the nape of Steve's neck stand up as a shiver runs down his spine. He's about to hang up but then he hears it, the breathing. Quiet and unsteady.

"...Hello?" he tries again, an uneasy feeling settling in his stomach.

There is a puff of breath followed by a guttural grunt and some rustling and Steve is straining his ears to hear more, to place the sounds, horrific scenarios dancing in front of his eyes. There could have been another attack. Nancy could be hurt and bleeding out, grasping for the phone as the speaker slips through her fingers and she's choking on her blood, unable to tell him to get help.

There is another grunt and a small, strained moan. It doesn't sound like it could be Nancy. It sounds like a lot of pain, though.

"Hey, are you all right?"

There is only a little huff in response. Steve's ear is going red, he's pressing the phone to it so hard, desperate to hear *anything* that could help him place the caller.

Nancy would have called Jonathan.

"Do you need help? Say something. Are you hurt?"

A choked off sound, amused.

"If this is a prank call," Steve exclaims, voice too loud in the quiet house, "I'm hanging up."

"...don't."

Steve is frozen to the spot. "O-okay," he manages. His eyes stray to the line of the forest again. He can see the tree tops swaying in the wind. He waits for the caller to follow up with something but there is only the sound of rugged breathing and some rustling. The night is dead silent and Steve takes a little comfort in that, knowing there would be growling and a whole lot more screaming if things were going *bad*.

"Look, why did you call me? What do you want?"

It takes a while till he gets his answer but when he hears the two small words, his blood runs cold. "Help... Max."

He can place the voice, damn straight he can. "Hargrove?"

There is a hitch in the breathing, something that sounds like a sob. "... diner. Help her."

"If this is your stupid plan to get me alone at four in the morning so you can finish me off, Hargrove, I swear I'm going to kill *you*."

There is no witty comeback, no, 'as if you could take me, Harrington,' there is just the same choked tone and a barely audible, "...please."

Steve's grip on the phone tightens, knuckles going white, heart pounding in his chest.

The line goes dead.

He lets out a curse. His breathing is now coming in harsh, uncontrolled puffs that crackle through the static of the line, reverberating through the speaker.

On the other end of the line, only silence.

A few more seconds pass before Steve shakes himself, propping the bat over his shoulder, pulling on some clothes so he doesn't freeze his ass off, and grabbing the keys to his car.

The air outside is crisp and the wind carries more bite than he thought. His fingers are shaking but he gets the car unlocked, throwing a cautious glance over his shoulder as he does so. The forest is quiet. Too quiet, now that he thinks about it. Damn it.

He scrambles in, slams the door shut and puts the car into reverse, tearing out of the driveway so impatiently that the tires squeal in protest.

If this is a prank, Hargrove's going to be sorry to ever think of it.

Steve drives through the night, fingers drumming a nervous rhythm to the steering wheel.

The diner is closed, the lights are out. At first glance, it's deserted.

Steve pulls into the parking lot, keeps the lights on and the car running. He grabs the bat before he gets out.

"Hargrove?"

He can't see him anywhere. Only the swirls of darkness, the empty parking lot, two beaming cones of light from his car. Steve slowly circles around the diner. Something is off about this.

"Hargrove! Show yourself, you coward!"

He spots the t-shirt first, then the blood.

"Shit, shit, shit," he mutters. The shirt is shredded, the blood is fresh.

“Ha-hargrove? Max?”

He should have brought a flashlight, goddamnit.

He finally sees a figure, hunched on the stairs. “Max?”

There is no response and Steve hurries over to her. She’s well hidden from the main road, one would easily overlook her if they were to look from the road, the parking lot or the terrace of the diner. She’s well hidden because who would actually walk the stairs at the dead of the night. Well, Steve Harrington, apparently.

“Hey, Max. Max. Can you hear me?” He’s kneeling down next to her, checking her pulse and finding it.

There is a huge gushing wound on her upper arm and it’s wrapped up in a makeshift gauze. The blood-soaked stripes come from the ruined t-shirt he saw earlier.

Max’s eyes flutter open. “Steve?”

“Hey, hey, kid. Easy, okay.” He helps her sit up.

Max looks around, confused. “What are you doing here, Steve?”

Steve’s asking himself the same question but he puts on a smile. “Helping you out, kid.”

2. Chapter 2

The sky is clear, the night is cold. Steve wouldn't be surprised if they got snowfall tomorrow.

He eyes the empty diner, the closed windows, the shut door. Nothing seems to have been disturbed.

He checks Max for other injuries but the only thing obviously wrong with her is her bleeding arm. "Can you get up?"

Max's movements are sluggish, her eyes take time focusing as she slowly blinks up at him. "Steve?"

"C'mon, kid, you'll catch your death here, it's so fucking cold." Steve gently pulls her to her feet. "Do you need me to drive you home? You don't live far from here, right?"

Max ignores his questions. "How did you know where I am?"

Steve guides her back to his car, props her against the side of it and grabs the first aid kit. Good thing he carries it around, fully stocked, after a few recent *events*.

"Your brother called me."

Max tenses. "Where's he?"

Steve shrugs. "No idea. Hold still." Her wound is deep but it's a clean cut and there is no dirt in it. He carefully wraps it, not fancying the idea of her blood getting everywhere.

"How did *you* get here anyway? What happened, Max?"

The question seems to pull Max out of her haze. She grabs Steve's hand in a vice grip, sways closer to him, panic showing on her face. "He's going to kill him."

Steve pries her fingers off his hand. "Max."

"No, Steve, Steve, I swear he will, he will do it. We have to... Billy

dropped me here but Neil knew it and he's going to kill him this time, Steve. Please."

Steve nudges her in the car. "Which way?"

One way runs back to the town, with houses and little picket fences and street lights, but the other way leads to where the road disappears into the line of the forest.

Max whines. "I don't know, Steve. I don't know."

Steve turns the car and drives towards the forest. As he passes the phone booth outside of the diner, a bloodied smear comes into view, a vaguely palm-shaped smudge on one side of it. Max whimpers and Steve floors the gas, not trying to think about how Hargrove almost killed them both not all that long ago.

Whatever. Now he knows he can't hold back because Hargrove is a dangerous lunatic who won't stop to hear reason. "It's going to be okay, Max. I promise he won't hurt him."

Max shakes her head and then squeezes her eyes shut and sucks in a pained gasp. "He already, did, Steve. It's bad."

Steve doesn't know what to say to that. "We should call Hopper."

Max cradles her wounded arm as they hit an uneven patch on the road. The forest is dark here and Steve haven't seen it coming, flying over it at full speed. "No, no police. You can't do that, Steve. It never helped before. It would only make everything worse."

He keeps his eyes on the road, cutting the corners full throttle, figuring he would see the headlights if any other car was coming in the opposite direction on this godforsaken road at this ungodly hour. "Okay, okay. What do you want me to do?"

"Stop them before it's too late?" Max doesn't sound too sure. "How far do you think they--"

"Jesus," Steve breaths out and slams the brakes.

The Camaro is stranded at the side of the road, the door on the

driver's side is not fully closed. There is no way in hell Hargrove would leave his car parked like this.

"Stay in the car." He cuts the engine.

"Steve—"

"Stay put, Maxine." He grabs the bat and slams the door, ending the argument.

The forest is quiet, only the sudden gust of wind rattling dry branches and the leaves that were too stubborn to fall down when the weather got chilly.

He inches towards the car, puts the tip of his foot into the gap to kick the door open. No one is inside the car and there is no blood. There are keys in the ignition, though. He's reaching for them when something creaks right next to him. He sways around, heart beating so hard he can feel it in his neck, the wild *thump, thump* of adrenaline.

Maxine holds up her hands, placating.

"Jesus fuck, kid, I told you to stay in the car."

"I wanted to see it."

"Yeah, well, now you see it." Belatedly, he lowers the bat. "Car's abandoned. This isn't like him."

"I don't know what got into him, Steve. But it – it was really scary."

He grabs the keys from Hargrove's car. "Scarier than the demodogs?"

"Nah." Max scoffs, a wry smile twisting her lips. Good.

"Listen, Max. I think we should go back, find a phone and call—"

From the forest comes a loud *snap*. They both freeze, staring at each other.

"Get back in my car," Steve says but this time he's not debating with

her, he grabs her by her good hand and shoves her into the driver's seat of his BMW. He presses the keys into her palm. "I trust you know what to do with this, don't you, Zoomer?"

"Steve?"

"Listen to me, Max, and listen carefully. You're going to drive back into the town. You go to the Byers and—"

"I'm not dragging them into this!"

He throws a glance around them but her shout doesn't seem to have attracted anything, the forest is silent again.

"All right, all right." He fishes the keys to his house and hands them to her. "You go back to my house. My folks aren't there, don't worry. There is a phone down in the hallway."

"What are you going to do?" The dressing of her wound is starting to get soaked through again.

"I'll take his car and continue looking." Steve's hand clenches and unclenches around the bat.

"Why can't I take the Camaro? I've driven it before," Max complains but she's starting the engine and fastening her seatbelt. The rumble of the engine is so loud, Steve never realized before how noisy it can get.

"It's been sitting here in the middle of the forest for god knows how long, anything could have happened to it. No way I'm letting you drive that thing."

"Be careful, Steve."

"I always am," he replies automatically. Max wiggles so she's sitting on the edge of the seat to reach the pedals. Her arm doesn't look so hot. "You good do drive?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just a scratch."

"Good. Go," Steve says and watches her pull away, the red tail lights

disappearing in the distance and the noise fading into nothing.

He stands there frozen for some time before he convinces his legs to start moving again. He could swear that sometimes he can *feel* the goddamn forest watching him.

3. Chapter 3

Steve's eyes adjust to the darkness of the forest.

The Camaro got some body repair and paint job done but Steve can still see where the dents around the side fender vents were. He trails his fingers over the blemishes.

He didn't caution Max to drive his car safely. Shit, Steve hopes it won't end up scratched the way the Camaro did, his father would have him gutted.

Too late to worry about it now, Max's long gone.

Steve comes to a stop in front of the Camaro, freeing a single leaf stuck in the front grille.

'Quit stalling, Harrington,' he tells himself. He crushes the leaf in his palm, lets the wind scatter the pieces. He stands up tall, hefting the bat over his shoulder.

He listens hard for any sound of movement and when nothing comes, he starts walking towards where he heard the branch snapping earlier.

His intuition turns out to be correct, leading him right into the shit storm.

Hargrove notices him first.

Steve doesn't even see him coming, he moves in so quick. One moment he's straining his ears for any sound – muffled steps or distant growling, the next Steve finds himself pinned against a trunk of a tree, face pressing into the bark. His grip goes slack from the surprise and his bat falls to the ground. With his luck, Steve figures he should be glad it didn't smack him in his knee on its way down.

He feels the hot puffs of breath on his skin as Hargrove speaks, voice nothing but a whisper, "What are you doing here, Harrington?"

Steve doesn't get to answer, Hargrove grabs a fistful of his hair and

slams his head against the tree. A sharp elbow to his ribcage follows soon after. The moment Steve lets out a pained moan, there is a hand covering his mouth.

This is it, this is how he dies. He should have gone with Max to get Hopper. He shouldn't have gone after this lunatic alone. *'He's going to kill him,'* Max said. He should have bought Nancy another bouquet. What was he thinking? That just because he got lucky with the demodogs, he could suddenly stop Hargrove from assaulting his father?

"I told you to get Max," Hargrove hisses into his ear, a harsh, angry sound. His hand slips from Steve's mouth to grip his chin, fingers digging into his jaw and forcing Steve to meet his crazed eyes.

"I did," Steve manages to say, barely moving his lips.

"You brought her here?" Hargrove says, suddenly letting go of Steve and spinning around, as if Max might leap out from any shadow and jump him.

Steve braces himself against the tree, gasping for air. His chest is heaving, little spots of darkness dancing just on the edge of his vision. He reaches for the bat, frozen fingers clumsily closing around the handle.

Hargrove spins a full circle and then turns his attention back to Steve. "I told you to help her," Hargrove snaps, his voice so quiet and full of barely contained rage that it sends shivers down Steve's spine. He would have preferred a shouting match instead. He would have preferred this to be quick.

"I did, I helped her," he manages, wheezing. The chilly air burns in his nose so he takes full gasps instead, opening his mouth and trying to catch his breath.

Hargrove is on him again, forcing him to stand upright, keeping him pinned against the tree with no room to move his arms, let alone swing the bat. "Where is she, then?" Hargrove snarls, eyes boring into Steve.

For the first time, Steve realizes the look Hargrove has on his face is *fear*. Something in him responds to it, making him bolder, more alert, more focused. “Not here. She’s safe,” he says and feels Hargrove’s body sag against him in relief.

He doesn’t get this, he doesn’t understand. If Max stopped Hargrove from trying to kill his father in one of his fits of uncontrolled rage, then shouldn’t Hargrove be pissed at her? Wasn’t that how Max got hurt? Probably getting between her brother and Neil and catching the heat of his hit?

He wants to ask, he’s opening his mouth and looking at Hargrove, taking in his bloodied face, the bruises he’s got all over, the question forming on the tip of his tongue, when there is another *snap*.

They both freeze, eyes locking. “The car,” Steve mouths and jerks his head in the direction from which he came.

Hargrove nods. His eyes are still wild but Steve notices they are frightened more than enraged.

Steve has zero desire to meet the source of Hargrove’s fear. Whatever can put that expression on his face can’t be anything good.

“Run,” Hargrove mouths.

Steve grabs his arm before he can bolt. There are a lot of things going on in Hawkins that Hargrove has no idea about. The demodogs loving a good chase being one of those things. If you run, you’re a prey. Prey equals food. Steve doesn’t fancy becoming a juicy snack. He leans down till the tip of his nose brushes against the curls of Hargrove’s hair. He can smell the cigarettes and blood, he hates that he can pick up on that. “No. Too noisy,” he whispers. “Nice and easy.”

Hargrove nods again, shrugging off Steve’s grip as if it was never there and taking a step away. Steve peels himself off the tree and starts walking back toward the road.

They take five, maybe six quiet steps but then the quick *snap, snap* of breaking twigs causes them to look at each other in alarm.

“It’s him,” Hargrove chokes out. Steve’s never heard him sound so terrified.

Without exchanging another word, they break into a run.

There is no more need to try being subtle. Whatever is out there with them knows about them as well.

The sound of something heavy tearing through the forest, following them, forces them into a mad dash.

They stumble over the roots, the low hanging branches scratch at their faces. Hargrove throws his hands up to shield his face but when Steve does the same, he nearly pokes his own eye out with the bat when a branch catches the sleeve of his jacket and jerks his hand backwards.

“Fuck,” Steve swears.

Hargrove yanks at the branch, freeing Steve’s sleeve. “Hurry up, hurry up. He’ll kill us, if he catches us.”

Hargrove’s face is ashen and he’s clutching at his side, apparently out of breath. Any other time, Steve would sneer at that but now, now he couldn’t care less. “Fucking forest, Hargrove. Have you lost your mind?”

“Was trying to buy you and Max some time,” Hargrove replies.

Steve gives up trying to understand anything anymore. He just knows that Hargrove isn’t actively trying to kill him, unlike the *thing* that is hot on their tails.

“This way,” he wheezes, picking up his speed again.

Hargrove matches his strides. Steve finds the sound of his pounding steps comforting.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you all for your comments, guys, you made my day! I'll respond and clear up the typos

tomorrow.

4. Chapter 4

The two of them stumble to the road, panting and heaving.

“Where’s your car?”

“Max has it,” Steve says, patting his pockets for the keys to the Camaro.

“Holy shit, you don’t have a car here?” Hargrove cast a quick glance around. “Wait, you let *Max* drive your car?”

“I’m driving yours,” Steve says quickly and gives Hargrove a helpful shove towards the parked Camaro.

Hargrove makes a frustrated sound, reluctant to get any closer to it. “First, I’d never let you drive and second, I don’t have the keys.”

“I’ve got them, genius.” Steve finally fishes them out of his pocket and dangles them on his finger for a second, holding them up for Hargrove to see but not long enough that he could get any ideas. He closes his fist around them and closes the remaining distance to the car.

Hargrove’s still standing where Steve left him. “He forgot the keys,” he mumbles. “No, he just let them behind because he didn’t care. He didn’t care.”

Steve gets the car opened and shoots him a worried look. “Get in, Hargrove.”

Hargrove climbs into the driver’s seat without any additional protests. Strange.

Steve jams the keys into the ignition, half expecting deafening music to start pouring from the radio. He’s disappointed, there is no music.

There is, however, a moment when he thinks the Camaro won’t start. Panic grips him, squeezing his throat, making his lungs burn with the need to breathe. The darkness of the forest moves closer to him, he could swear by it. He wonders if Barbara felt it too.

The Camaro reeks more of an alcohol than the cigarettes, which is surprising since Hargrove doesn't reek of alcohol at all.

The car finally starts, low rumble of the engine shaking the seats.

Steve's dangerously close to losing his mind. He clears his throat. "Say, Hargrove, how did you get Max to the diner?"

Hargrove shrugs, not bothering with an answer.

Steve needs to get him talking without provoking him. The silence is choking but he'd still take that over Hargrove's hands choking him.

He turns the car back to the town, nervously checking the rear view mirror the whole time.

The atmosphere in the car is tense and Steve only lasts a couple of minutes before the urge to scream starts burning in his throat. He needs to break the silence. "I see you've got yourself a new paint job," he says. "Nice."

Hargrove goes still, anger flashing through his eyes.

Steve frowns. "I mean..." Shit, reminding Hargrove of how Max stole and drove his car, successfully denting it in the process, was not a smart opener.

Hargrove slams his hand against the dashboard, palm flat. "I know what you mean, you stupid prick."

"Chill out, man." Steve keeps his eyes on the road. They're almost back in the town.

"Don't fucking tell me what to do, Harrington. Just keep your trap shut. It was me who gave *you* a new paint job, remember? You do not want to piss me off again."

"I meant the car! Jesus. I meant your fucking car, okay?"

Hargrove is silent for a long moment. Then, just when Steve is wondering if he should pull over and make a run for it before Hargrove launches over the seats and gets them both killed, Hargrove

laughs.

It starts small, a quiet chuckle escaping his lips but then he's laughing in earnest, shoulders shaking like he can't help himself. He rests both of his hands on the dashboard and hides his face in them. "For Christ's sake, Harrington," he says, drawing in a breath, trying to get himself under control. "You don't know a thing about cars, do you?"

"Hey!" Steve starts, offended. "I'll let you know that... that I..." he trails off. That his father made sure he knew how to change his own goddamn oil? That his father gave him a profound lecturing before handing over the keys to the BMW?

"That you don't give a shit about cars," Hargrove fills in for him.

Steve lets out a small sigh. "Yeah."

It sends Hargrove into another laughing fit and Steve listens to it for a few moments before starting to laugh too, it's so contiguous and here he is, in the middle of the night, driving Hargrove's Camaro and pretending none of the things in the forest were real. It's ridiculous.

Hargrove quiets down again. "It's called paintless dent repair, you asshole."

"Oh. Okay." He steals a quick glance at Hargrove. He seems to be relaxed, lips curling up in a smile even though the gash on his cheek started welling with blood again. "Like you said. I don't give a shit."

Hargrove huffs out a laugh and Steve wonders if his own laughter sounds just as desperate, like it could break into a frustrated scream or pained sob any second.

They pass the diner. The phone booth isn't visible from this side of the road.

Steve takes the next turn left.

"Hey, Harrington?"

"Hm?"

“Where are you taking me?”

Steve meets Hargrove’s eyes, surprised by the question. He thought they were clear on that. “Max’s waiting for us at my place.”

“Oh.”

Steve’s tone grows sharper again. “You got any problem with that?”

“Nah.” Hargrove looks out of the window, watching the houses and the stupid little picket fences pass by. “Man, I’d kill for a smoke right now.”

“No smoking in the car,” Steve blurts out, then wishes he could bite his tongue off. Not his stupid car, not his problem in the smoke lingers in the upholstery. The car reeks something vile anyway.

He feels Hargrove’s eyes on him but he doesn’t say anything.

The night is still dark and there is no traffic. Now that they’re not surrounded by the tall shadows of the trees, Steve feels a bit stupid. Whatever *presence* he thought he felt back in the forest seems just like a distant memory right now.

The silence is still driving him crazy, though. “You know, Hargrove, I was wondering. Was it you who taught Max to drive? Because that would explain a few things.”

5. Chapter 5

Hargrove gets out of the car the moment Steve puts it in park. “The house looks empty.”

“Yeah.” Steve’s tired of explaining this. “My folks aren’t home.”

“Lucky you, having the house for yourself tonight.”

Steve doesn’t correct the assumption. “Lucky *for you*, seeing that you’re about to exploit my hospitality.”

“Oh, big words. Did your girl taught you to use those in your essays?”

He slams the car’s door with a bit more force than necessary, locks it and pretends not to see Hargrove’s outstretched hand as he walks past him to the front door.

His BMW is in the driveway and doesn’t look damaged. Thank god.

He’s reaching for his pocket before he realizes he left his keys with Max. Instead of walking back to the street and ringing the doorbell, Steve knocks on the door. Hargrove follows behind him, poking the tip of his shoe underneath the doormat as they wait for Max to answer the door.

Steve stamps his foot down, flattening the doormat and sliding it back into its position. “We’re more the flower pots kinda family, you know?”

“Huh?”

“Keys under the flower pots,” Steve says lightly.

Hargrove shuffles his feet. “What’s taking her so long?”

Steve knocks again.

A few minutes pass by.

The trees around the house sway in the wind; there is a branch that

keeps hitting the roof, making a scratching sound.

“Nice place,” Hargrove says, tone mocking. He’s taking in the house, the front garden, the chimney of the fire place.

The truth is, the place is giving Steve the chills right now, all dark and empty, not a single light lit. This is how it looks when he goes to bed. This is how it looks from the outside at night.

Steve slams his hand against the wooden panel of the door so hard it rattles in its hinges. “Max,” he calls out. “It’s us.”

Finally, there are steps in the hallway. Hargrove lets out an audible sigh, his clenched fists loosening.

“Steve?”

“Yeah, open up, Max.”

The chains rattle, the door unlocks. Max’s worried face looms in the doorway. She holds the door opened. “You found him! Oh. Come in.”

She closes and locks the door behind them.

Steve reaches for the light switch, then pauses. “Why is it so dark in here?”

Max yawns and crosses her arms, palms rubbing some feeling back into them. “Would feel too exposed. All that glass.”

“Oh, yeah. That.” Steve lets his hand fall, eyes adjusting to the darkness inside the house.

Hargrove slouches against the wall, head narrowly missing a framed picture. From the way his mouth twists, Steve would bet his ass he’s done it on purpose.

Steve ignores him. “You okay?” He addresses Max.

She nods. “Yeah. I just... I was so drowsy. I fell asleep again.” She turns to Hargrove and moves towards him. Steve watches her, ready to jump between her and her bother if he tries something. He did call

Steve for hep, though. He wanted her to be safe. Steve needs some serious answers, from both of them.

“Maxine,” Hargrove says, voice thick with some emotion Steve can’t place.

“I’m sorry,” Max says, biting her lip. She rubs at her arms again, but this time Steve notices the way she’s trying and failing not to scratch her wound. The arm’s clearly bothering her but Steve doesn’t say anything, watching the siblings’ exchange quietly.

“Don’t be sorry, squirt. What you did was right.”

“But it was stupid!”

“I never said it wasn’t,” Hargrove says. “Very brave but very stupid.”

“Kinda runs in the family, huh?” It’s the wrong thing to say and Max seems to realize it the moment she says it.

Hargrove’s expression closes off. “Punk.”

“God. I hate you so much!” Max says and before Steve can do anything, she flings herself at Hargrove, catching him by surprise. She wraps her arms around him in a fierce tackle-hug. “I’m sorry,” she says again, squeezing her arms around his waist.

Hargrove lets out a pained hiss and shoves her away.

“Shit, sorry,” Max says. “I forgot.” Her hands reach for his shirt but he moves out of her reach.

“It’s okay, Max.”

Steve clears his throat. “Am I driving either of you to the hospital?”

Max glances up at her brother and they have a silent conversation and Steve hates that. He hates that he’s standing right there and still missing crucial parts of what’s going on.

“Yeah, I guess not,” Steve says and moves further down the hallway to get to the kitchen.

His two unexpected guests join him.

“You didn’t call Hopper, did you.”

Max sits on the stool and watches Steve get out three glasses from the cabinet and open the fridge. “No.”

He cuts open a carton of OJ and fills one of the glasses. “Drink,” he tells Max.

She looks at him, incredulous. “Seriously? This is what you’re worried about now?”

“I don’t care if you’re thirsty or not,” Steve tells her patiently. “You lost some blood. This will help.”

Hargrove leans over the counter, braced on his forearms. “Also, remember that drink that zonked you out of it, kid? The more liquids, the less shit circling through your system.”

“Uh. What he said,” Steve says. “Drink up.”

Max glares at Hargrove first, then at Steve, then grabs the glass and drinks the juice.

‘Good girl,’ Steve wants to say but stops himself in time. Hargrove does it for him, ruffling Max’s hair as he does so. She ducks out of his reach and swats at his arm but she doesn’t look angry.

Steve wonders how much pain is Hargrove in. He’d refuse to take any painkillers Steve would offer, that’s for sure. Steve reaches into the cabinets again, mixes his and Hargrove’s glasses half juice and half vodka.

He jerks his head, indication for Hargrove to get his glass. Hargrove gives him an amused smirk, grabs the glass and grabs the bottle of vodka Steve hasn’t yet put away.

“Hey!” Steve manages, but there’s no heat in it. Whatever gets them through the night.

6. Chapter 6

Steve leads them upstairs to his room, motions to Max to take his bed. “You’re dead on your feet,” he cuts off her protests.

Hargrove pauses in the doorway. “What time are your folks back, Harrington?”

Max kicks off her sneakers, crawls into the bed, resting her head against the headboard and cradling her arm to her chest. “What he means is, are you going to let us stay the night here?”

Steve switches on the lamp on his desk so there is at least some light in the room. He wants to see exactly where Hargrove is, not just guess by the vague shapes of his room. “Sure. Unless there’s something else I could do for you.”

Steve hops on the desk of his table, kicks the chair in Hargrove’s direction. It scrapes against the floor and Hargrove catches it before it topples over. He swivels it around, sits down on it backwards and props his chin on its back.

“You’ve done enough,” Hargrove says curtly.

“Which we’re thankful for,” Max says quickly. “What happened out there anyway? Did you see him?”

“Shut up, Max.”

Steve’s fingers twitch for hit bat. He’s got it lying on his desk, inches away. He crosses his arms, resisting the temptation. “See who?”

“No one,” snaps Hargrove at the same time that Max blurts out, “Neil.”

“I didn’t see anyone, Max. Just stumbled into him,” Steve points a finger at her brother, “and then we got the hell out of there.”

It’s Hargrove’s turn to look puzzled. “You didn’t see anyone? Why else would we be running? I thought you’ve heard it, too.”

“Heard what?” Max asks and her eyes stray to Steve’s desk. “Did you hear *something*?”

Max swivels her legs over the edge of the bed, jumping to her feet. “Oh my god, if it’s out there and so is Neil, then—”

Hargrove’s out of the chair in an eye blink, grabbing Max and letting her sag against him when the dizziness overtakes her. Then he slowly pushes her back to sit on the bed. He crouches down, keeping one hand on her leg. “Max?”

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Max says weakly.

Steve slides of the table and shows them to the bathroom. Max does a lot of dry heaving but doesn’t actually throw up.

Steve fills her glass with water and hands it to her.

“It’s okay, Max. It’s just the drugs, you should sleep it off and you’ll be fine when you wake up, I swear,” Hargrove says to her, tone low and calming. It’s weird, hearing this tone of his voice, Steve muses.

Max seems to be calmed by it and lets Hargrove help her back to bed.

“Anything I can get you?” Steve asks her, hovering.

“An extra blanket would be nice,” Hargrove says distractedly, inspecting the gash on Max’s arm.

Steve grabs the blanket, hands it to Hargrove and returns to his perch on the table. “First aid kit is under the sink, if she needs it.”

“It’s fine,” Hargrove decides. “Try to fall asleep, kid.”

Max closes her eyes and Steve waits a few moments before quietly asking his question. “What did she mean, if we saw Neil? What would he be doing out there? And what were *you* doing out there?”

Hargrove gnaws on his lip. “What do you think, genius?” He sounds defensive but he looks just as tired as Max does and Steve vividly remembers the fear he saw on Hargrove’s face earlier.

“What I think—”

“That was a rhetorical question, you moron.”

Steve can't just let it slide. “What I think,” he says as if he hasn't been interrupted, “is that you got angry and went after Neil and Max got in between you, trying to stop the fight, and got hurt.”

“Yeah, well, you think again,” Hargrove says.

“Oh, really? Because I know you, Hargrove, and you—”

“You *think* you know me,” Hargrove snarls, raising to his feet and towering over Steve. Since Steve's still sitting at his desk, he has to look up to see Hargrove's face.

Steve meets his eyes, unflinching. “No, see. I *know* you.”

“If you know me so well, Harrington, then tell me. Did I drug her before or after I stabbed her with that knife, huh?”

Steve reels back. “What?”

Hargrove shoves him, fingers poking into Steve's chest but there isn't enough force in it to push Steve off balance.

“You think you know everything but you don't know shit.”

Steve's heart is hammering in his chest and he knows Hargrove must feel it underneath his fingers. There's little he can do about that. “Why... why don't you tell me then. Make me understand.”

Hargrove scoffs. “Like you would believe me.”

“Try me.”

“I don't have to explain myself to you, Harrington,” Hargrove says but he drops his arm and takes a step back, moving to the window overlooking the backyard instead.

'Prick,' Steve thinks. “You don't have to, no. But it would help if I knew what's going on and before you say anything, let me just

remind you that it was you who called me in the middle of the night.”

“It was you who dropped everything and rushed to help, though,” Hargrove replies easily.

Steve’s seething. “Of course I helped you! You sounded like you were dying! I thought there’d be blood. Oh my god, there was blood, wasn’t there.”

He moves in to check Hargrove’s side. “You didn’t flinch because Max tried to hug you, you flinched because you’re hurt.”

Hargrove catches his hands before Steve gets to see it. “Don’t.”

Steve breaks free from the grip. “How am I supposed to work with you when you don’t tell me anything, huh? A little trust wouldn’t hurt.”

Hargrove is silent for a moment, then he says, “What did you think we were running from in that forest, if you didn’t know Neil was there?”

Steve runs a hand through his hair. “I can’t tell you that.”

“Then I can’t tell you anything, either.”

“Look, it was dark, I was already freaking out from finding Max covered in blood,” Steve begins, waits for Hargrove to nod. “Then I found you – you startled me.” Another nod. “And then there was some animal or something out there, you heard the twigs snap just as loud and clear as I did, didn’t you?”

“I did,” Hargrove says. “Tell you something, though, Harrington. You’re a lousy liar.”

7. Chapter 7

Twirling his glass and taking sips is a good avoidance tactic. Until his glass gets empty. Then he's just sitting there, fiddling with an empty glass and looking like a moron.

Hargrove scoffs, unscrews the lid and pours more vodka into Steve's glass. They have run out of the orange juice.

Max sighs in her sleep and turns to her side, face away from the lamp on the table. Steve reaches to switch the lamp off so the light doesn't bother her.

"Are you really gonna let us stay the night?" Hargrove asks when the room plunges into darkness.

"It's almost morning anyway," Steve says, watching Hargrove's silhouette against the window. How can he act so relaxed around Steve is a mystery. Hell, how can he act so composed after everything that went down tonight is beyond Steve. "The sky's getting clearer."

"It's such a weird shade. Almost purple."

"Means there will be snow, soon."

"Man, I hate snow," Hargrove mutters, his back still on Steve.

'*You hate everything.*' Steve wisely keeps his mouth shut about that. "Have you ever even seen snow?"

Hargrove doesn't respond to that. Steve's starting to realize that it's his way of answering.

"Okay, I'm going to bring us some water. You want anything?"

"How about you – shutting up?"

Steve wishes Hargrove wasn't so good at railing him up by just talking to him. "Fuck you."

"You offering?"

Steve can *hear* the smirking. He flips Hargrove off and takes a few steps out of the room but before he can get to the stairs, Hargrove calls out to him, voice completely different, going too soft all of the sudden.

“Harrington?”

“What?” Steve keeps his tone flat.

“Do you have a dog or something?”

Steve pauses in his tracks. The hair on the nape of his neck stand up.

“What, no. Why?”

“I think there’s one outside,” Hargrove says tightly.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Steve exhales. “I fucking knew it.” He’s back in his room in a flash, grabbing his bat from his desk as he moves to stand at the window, shoulder to shoulder with Hargrove. “Where is it? I can’t see anything.”

“It’s gone,” Hargrove says, eyes trying to track any movement beneath the windows.

“For now,” Steve mutters.

“It was right there, it was huge. It didn’t even look much like a dog. I swear I saw it,” Hargrove says quickly.

“I know, I believe you.”

“It was – You do?”

Steve’s hear starts pounding in his chest. “Do you know how to shoot a gun?”

“What the fuck, Harrington?”

“I’ll take that as no. There’s a phone downstairs, you need to call Hopper.”

Hargrove turns his face to look at Steve as if he’d lost his mind. “You

want me to call the cops on a stray dog?”

“Okay, so.” Steve pulls at his hair. “They’re called demodogs. And more importantly, they’re all supposed to be dead. Or gone. Whatever. Just. They’re not supposed to be here.”

“Demodogs?”

“Yes, focus. You need to tell Hopper. Actually, no wait. You’re right. You stay here with Max, I’ll go call him.” He hesitates for a moment but then shoves the bat into Hargrove’s hand. “Take this. Close the door behind me. Try to move the table or the wardrobe to barricade it.”

“Where are you going?” Hargrove asks, bewildered.

Steve suddenly feels much calmer. It’s probably the adrenaline. “I’m going to grab dad’s shotgun, go downstairs and call Hopper. You stay here.”

“You’re mad.”

“If all fails, try playing dead.”

“You’re not leaving,” Hargrove says, grabbing Steve, fingers curling around his arm so tightly there will probably be bruises later. Steve tries to shrug him off but Hargrove holds on even tighter.

“Let go of me, you asshole.”

“You’re barking mad,” Hargrove hisses at him.

“What’s going on?” Max wakes up. Fuck.

“Nothing,” he tries to assure her. “Go back to sleep.”

“The hell? He’s trying to go after this... this demodog or whatever.”

Max pulls herself up on the bed and now she’s officially wide awake. Of course she is. “You told him?!”

“Max! I didn’t–!” Steve throws his hands up, which would look better

if Hargrove wasn't still pinning his arm.

"We're not supposed to tell anyone! Not even about the demodogs, Steve. You know that. *You* lectured *us* about it."

"I know, I know."

Hargrove clears his throat. "If it helps, then technically, he didn't tell me, I saw it from the window, it was running outside."

Max nearly falls from the bed. "What?! Oh please no. No, no, no. That doesn't help at all."

"It's fine Max. We've dealt with them once, we can do it again," Steve tries to reason.

"But they're supposed to be gone!"

"I know. I have no idea how they got back. But we need to call Hopper." Steve turns to Hargrove again. "Let. Go."

Hargrove lets go of him, finally, but he moves to block the door. "What are these demodogs?"

Steve opens his mouth but nothing comes out. He doesn't want to explain this to Hargrove and he wouldn't even know where to begin. The whole thing is a mess and the fewer people know, the better.

"They are the result of a failed lab experiment," Max pipes up. Steve could kiss her. "It's a super secret project but they got out and it's in everyone's best interest to keep that a secret, too."

"Demodogs?" Hargrove shakes his head. "What a stupid ass name is that."

"It's a good name," Max says.

"It's a great name," Steve assures her because Dustin is a genius.

"Anyway," Max goes on, "they're dangerous and they're out there. Hopper needs to know."

Hargrove glances out of the window again. "Maybe it was just a dog."

"You just said it didn't look anything like a dog," Steve grumbles.

"Don't mind him, denial is the first stage," Max advises.

"Look, it's not just you," Steve says. "It's been weird for a while. I noticed it, too."

Max hums thoughtfully. "You think that when we found the Camaro—"

"Yeah."

Hargrove's breathing is quick and fast. Steve can hear the small puffs of breath. "You think that... that thing I just saw was out there in the forest with us?"

"Yeah," Steve says again. "That's why I wanted a quiet retreat. Trust me, these things can get vicious."

Max just nods.

"Holy shit. You're saying that the thing outside—"

There is a *shattering* noise from downstairs. Glass breaking into pieces as something forces its way into the house.

"Is now inside," Steve says, a little hysterically.

"Get the doors!" Max screams.

Both him and Hargrove jump to the door, slamming it shut. They pull Steve's desk against it for a good measure.

8. Chapter 8

Hargrove's stammering a steady stream of curses, stumbling away from the desk. Steve takes back the bat from his shaking fingers.

"Shut up," he tells Hargrove. Hargrove ignores him. His hand is clutching at the pendant on his necklace, stroking the chain with the pad of his thumb. Steve doubts he's aware of doing that. "Seriously, you need to shut up, I can't hear a thing."

Hargrove nods, biting down on his lip and closing his eyes.

All Steve can hear is their breathing and the creaking of the bed as Max settles on it. Steve looks over his shoulder to check on her. "You doing ok?"

Max attempts to smile. "Better here than in that bus, right? Do you think there's just this one demodog?"

"I have no idea, Max. But I think there was one out in the forest, too. Maybe they're all over the place again. So yeah, this is definitely better than the bus."

"But back then it wasn't just the two of us who knew about them," Max reminds him.

"Well. At least now there's only one way they can come in." Steve motions to the door.

"Unless they go for the window. If they don't simply tear through a wall, that is," Max says and to her credit, she sounds more thoughtful than panicky.

Steve frowns. "I haven't seen one do stuff like that, Max." He glances at the window. "Maybe you should go into the bathroom."

"Right now?"

Steve shakes his head. "Only if we hear the bastard moving upstairs. Then you go inside, lock the door behind you and hope it thinks it's just me and your brother here to be its snack, okay?"

They are silent for a moment, listening for any sounds coming from downstairs. No matter how much Steve tries, he can't hear anything.

"Steve?"

"What? You heard something?"

"No," Max says. "I was thinking. You're part of our group, right?"

Steve ignores the way Hargrove opens his eyes and focuses on him. "Uh. Yeah? I think so, kid."

"When I became a part of their group, the guys gave me a walkie talkie," Max tells him.

Steve knew that but it's apparently news for Hargrove. "They gave you a—"

"Max, you're a genius," Steve interrupts Hargrove. "Try the side of that night stand."

Max gets down on the floor, opening the cabinet and peering inside. "It's not here."

Steve makes a frustrated sound. "I might have put it under the bed?"

Max crawls under the bed. "Nothing."

"Oh shit," Steve curses, remembering where his gift from the group is. "It's in my father's room, two doors left down the hallway from here."

"We are *not* leaving this room when that dog is still sniffing out there," Hargrove tells them coldly.

Max and Steve share a look.

"If you're not going to help me with that table, then at least step aside," Steve says, pushing past Hargrove to get to the door.

Hargrove makes a fuss for a moment but then helps him move the desk back into its original position.

Then they all hold their breath, listening if the commotion attracted the demodog's attention.

The house is as silent as always and after a few minutes, Steve ventures to grab the doorknob, quietly opening the door into the hallway.

He takes a quick peek, then whispers to Hargrove, "It's clear."

"Do we all go or-?"

Steve kicks off his shoes. "You stay with Max. If I'm not back within three minutes, lock the door again." Before Hargrove can respond, he slips through the door, quiet as a mouse, moving through the hallway to his father's room.

The door creaks when he pushes them open and he freezes, listening for the tale-telling sound of feet scraping against the staircase but there is not a single peep.

He quickly scans the room and spots the walkie talkie, right where his father set it down when Steve first came to him with it. His dad said he'd take a look at it when Steve mentioned the issues but he never did and Steve knew better than to try reminding him. He grabs it and starts paddling back to the room where Max and Hargrove are holed up.

The door is ajar, just the tiniest crack. Steve couldn't even stick his hand through it, let alone squeeze past. He quickly casts a glance behind him. The staircase is deserted. Not daring to speak up, Steve softly taps against the door with the tip of his index finger. They don't let him in.

He pushes against the door but it doesn't budge.

Another quick glance at the staircase. Nothing there.

Steve puts his weight against the door, without any result.

The darkness is spreading soundlessly.

"Guys," he whispers. When that fails to grant him any response, he

quietly calls out, "Let me in!"

There is a commotion behind the door, he sees a swish of Max's hair and then he's pulled inside.

He falls back against the door, heaving. "What the fuck, guys?"

Hargrove's face is unreadable.

"Did you get it, Steve?"

Steve would like to answer Max but he finds himself captured by the Hargrove's strange stare.

"You found it, great!" Max takes the walkie talkie from him and goes to sit back on the bed. "This is... damn it. Steve!"

"Language, Max," Hargrove reprimands her, finally taking his eyes off Steve. He casually reaches around Steve and locks the door. He arches an eyebrow and Steve sucks in a breath, then nods and they push the desk against the door.

Max holds out the batteries and the cover lid in one hand, the walkie talkie in the other. "What's wrong with it?"

"Oh shit, I completely forgot about that." Steve comes to sit on the bed next to her. "No idea, Max. I meant to bring it to the repair but then it slipped my mind."

"We're screwed," Max says with a sigh, dropping the walkie talkie to the mattress.

"Maxine," Hargrove says warningly. Max flips him off without looking at him. Steve hides his smile by ducking his head.

9. Chapter 9

Steve crosses his legs and miserably stares down at the walkie talkie.

“So what, the batteries are dead?” Hargrove asks.

“Nah, they’re new, it must be something else.”

“Give me that,” Hargrove says while he’s grabbing the walkie talkie. He blows into the uncovered part, then slots the batteries back in. “The contacts are clean, the antenna undamaged.”

“Hm.”

Hargrove pushes a few buttons and Steve suppresses the urge to get up and yank it from his hands before he causes more damage to it. Or realizes what him and Max already know, that the transceiver is absolutely useless right now and decides to toss it out of the window. Steve has never been good at predicting people’s reactions and Hargrove flies off the charts entirely. Though, Hargrove getting angry is always a good guess.

Hargrove squeezes the tip of the antenna, then goes back to fiddling with the buttons. “You sure you didn’t just turn down the volume?”

“I’m not an idiot, Hargrove.”

Hargrove scoffs, tossing the walkie talkie back to Steve. “Sure, you’re not.”

The radio crackles to life.

“Holy shit!” Both him and Max scramble for it, ecstatic.

“Don’t know about the frequency, though,” Hargrove says with a small shrug, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

“I’ve got it,” Max says, tugging at the walkie. Steve lets go and watches her push the talk button.

“This is code red. I repeat, this is code red. Does anyone copy? Over.”

They sit in silence for a few moments, then Max tries again. "We've got a code red situation. Code red! Do you guys copy? We need your help. Over."

"Looks like your little friends are too busy catching their zzzs." Hargrove returns to stand near the door, as far away from them as the bedroom lets him.

"CODE RED! Guys! Code red!" Max calls out. "Damn it."

"Max," Hargrove says again in a warning tone and this time both Steve and Max send him a dirty look.

"Maybe El will, you know," Steve says, patting Max's comfortingly on her back.

"Yeah." Max's shoulders slump.

"Keep trying to reach them," Steve says.

Hargrove sneers. "So, what's the plan now?"

"I don't know. We wait till the morning and hope Max gets someone's attention." Steve gets up from the bed and peers out of the window.

Dark shadows. Tall trees of the forest. The wind is tearing down leaves from the trees in the garden. No monsters anywhere in sight.

"We're all sitting here like ducks. I hate that," Hargrove says.

Steve agrees with that but he still has to argue. "If that thing is in the house, you'd march right onto its dinner plate."

"It's a bit late for dinner, don't you think?" Before Steve has the chance to reply, Hargrove goes on, "We should go take a look. What if it's not the demodog but a regular burglar? He'd be long gone by now."

Steve isn't exactly jazzed about the idea. "You think?"

Hargrove nods. "Yeah. And for the record, Harrington, I do know how to use a shotgun."

It takes a moment for Steve to realize it's not supposed to be a threat.

"C'mon guys. This is serious. Is anyone out there? Do you copy? This is Zoomer. Code red, code red," Max is saying to the walkie, a desperate edge to her voice.

"Okay," Steve says quickly, before he changes his mind. "Okay."

"I'd like my keys back, though."

The house is silent. The chances that the intruder might not have been visiting from the Upside Down are looking more and more probable now that Steve's really thinking about it. God knows what Hargrove really saw. Might have been a stray. A huge ass stray that freaked out someone like Hargrove. Yeah, right.

"Fine. Here," Steve says, giving up the keys.

Hargrove snatches them out of Steve's hand. "Good. Let's go. I'll watch your back."

Steve doesn't consider that to be much reassuring.

Without having to talk about it, they tiptoe to Steve parent's bedroom. Steve gets the shotgun from the gun safe and hands it to Hargrove. He prefers his bat anyway.

On the top of the staircase, they both pause, listening intently for any sounds coming from the house. There is nothing. When Steve really concentrates, all he can make out are the muffled sounds of Max talking to the walkie talkie in the distance.

Hargrove gives him a nudge and they begin their descent.

They move silently. Steve is very aware of how cold the house has actually gotten and this time it's not just his imagination. His hair moves to his face as they're met with a draft of wind.

When they make it downstairs, they pause and listen. Disturbing a burglar would be only a marginally less stupid idea than to cross a demodog's path.

Steve wavers, unsure where to check first.

“Nothing. You?” Hargrove’s standing so close to him the heat from his body registers.

Steve shakes his head. “I don’t hear anything.”

“Good,” Hargrove says, taking a first step towards the kitchen, gun aimed. “I think it came from here.”

Steve trails after him with apprehension.

Everything is quiet and normal.

No one seems to be in the house but them. They make their way into the kitchen.

The window there is broken, smashed from the outside in. The glass is everywhere.

Among the shards of glass sits a dark, twisted tree branch.

Steve hefts the bat over his shoulder and lets out a nervous chuckle. “This is what got us all so worked up?”

“I’ll get the lights,” Hargrove says seconds before the lights in the kitchen flicker on.

The shattered panel of the window is too small for anything else but the branch to get in. Steve gets out the whisk broom and clears the mess. He then takes the old newspaper from the table and tapes the sheet against the broken part of the window. He makes a mental note to call someone to get it replaced before his parents come back.

He doesn’t need the lecture.

10. Chapter 10

The moment the window is sealed again, the curtains that were blowing out with the draft fall back down. The hem of the curtain catches on a statue that's on the coffee table, taking it down. It topples over and shatters on the tiles.

Hargrove whips around, gun ready.

"You know," Stay says, watching as Hargrove slowly lowers his gun, "this is the first time that I don't feel like you're going to shoot me in the back and feed me to the demodogs as a distraction to buy yourself enough time to get away."

"Can't say I wasn't thinking about it," Hargrove says with an easy smile. Steve can't tell if he's joking or not.

Steve chooses not to say anything.

With the muzzle of the shotgun, Hargrove pokes at the pitiful pile of shards that used to be a statue just a few seconds ago. "You're going to be sorry this wasn't that demodog of yours. Your parent's are going to kill you when they find out about this."

Steve handpicks the biggest shards. "It's not like it was Mapplethorpe or anything. Mum will never know." *Dad would never notice.* Steve stands up and uses the rest of the newspaper to wrap the remains of the statue up before tossing it all into the bin.

"Want me to go check out the rest of the house?"

"You don't have to—"

"It's fine," Hargrove dismisses, wandering off into the darkened corners of the house.

Steve stares after him, puzzled. Then he shakes his head and continues cleaning the mess left behind the broken window and the statue.

He's kneeling down, running his hand over the tiles beneath the

window to make sure he got all the shards, when Hargrove comes back. Steve doesn't see him until he's getting back to his feet and turning to go to the kitchen and Hargrove's right there, not even five feet away from him, watching him like the creep he is.

Steve doesn't scream, which he considers quite an accomplishment. "What?" He asks once he's sure his voice won't come out as a nervous squeak.

"Say, Harrington. The phone in the hallway, does it work?"

"Of course it does," Steve says, then realizes what he's saying. "Holy shit, yes, it *does*."

Hargrove only makes a small sidestep as Steve sweeps past him.

Steve reaches for the receiver, fingers about to dial Hopper's number. Then he wavers, not knowing what he'd tell him. That he had a hunch? That Billy Hargrove, the ever angry dimwit might have seen a demodog in Steve's backyard? That would go over well, Steve can imagine.

He hangs up the phone and ignores Hargrove's raised eyebrow.

"Hey, so, it's almost morning. You could take the couch while I go get the guestroom ready for Max, cool?" There is no need to make sure if it is ready – mother likes to keep up the pretences of their perfect little family, always ready for their guests to stay overnight. Steve is quite certain that no one had actually slept over at their house for *years* but the bedding still gets changed every other week.

Hargrove nods. "But I'm keeping the gun for now."

"Whatever."

Steve bounds up the stairs and pokes his head into his room. He finds Max fast asleep, still clutching the walkie talkie in her hand. It doesn't look like she had much luck contacting anybody but at least she's sleeping. Steve knows he wouldn't be sleeping for days in he were in her place. Well, not unless someone drugged his drink to make him all drowsy. Shit, it's a miracle she drove herself back here all in one piece.

Max's so out of it she doesn't even stir when he walks to the bed and takes the walkie from her. He puts it on the night stand, within an easy reach from the bed. She's had a rough night and Steve doesn't feel like waking her up just to get her moved to another bed.

"Night, Max," he whispers. He quietly closes the door again, then rests his head against it.

He doesn't need the spare bedroom for himself. He won't be getting any sleep tonight. Even if he managed to shut his eyes, he'd be up again within minutes, having his sleep haunted by the nightmares. It's better to wait till his body is so tired it just shuts down on him and grants him a couple of hours of exhausted, dreamless sleep.

Steve drags himself back downstairs. It wouldn't be fair making Hargrove sleep on the couch when there's a perfectly good bed upstairs that he can use.

Since Hargrove still has the gun and Steve holds no qualms about how trigger-happy Hargrove might be right now, he doesn't want to sneak up on him.

He announces his presence the moment he steps into the living room. "Hey, Hargrove, I was thinking you could take the—"

Hargrove's face appears above the couch, wide and startled. "Harrington!"

"Jesus! Are you all right?"

"What are you doing back here?" Hargrove grumbles, turning around, away from Steve. It's a moot point, Steve's already seen it. The cuts, welts and bruises are even more prominent now that Hargrove's back is turned.

"Jesus Christ."

"Shut up," Hargrove tells him half-heartedly. "It's not that bad."

"Um. Yes it is," Steve argues, coming around the couch to see the true extent of the damage. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Without thinking, he reaches for the wound Hargrove's been trying to tend to. It's a gash, quite similar to the one Max has on her arm, but this is on Hargrove's hip and reaches all the way to his lower back. It's shallow but nasty. How does one even function with an injury like that is beyond Steve.

"It's worse than it looks. I tore it up while we were running." Hargrove glares at him defiantly.

The moment Steve's fingers touch the bare skin above the injury, Hargrove flinches. Steve jerks his hand back. "Sorry."

"You just can't help yourself around me, can you, Harrington?" It doesn't come out anywhere near as cocky Hargrove surely wanted it to sound.

"Yeah. You're irresistible, Billy. The blood really does it for me, you know?"

Hargrove looks away and doesn't say anything. He's got the first aid kit opened on the table. He must have nicked it from Steve's room. There's a gauze fallen between the cushions on the couch, Hargrove way probably trying to reach his wound to tape it when Steve walked in on him.

"Let me get that for you," Steve nods to Hargrove's wounded side, grabbing the gauze.

11. Chapter 11

“Hands off,” Hargrove says, snatching the gauze from Steve. He does a funny little twist while leaning back against the couch and tapes the wound himself.

“Wow. Um, okay.” Steve can’t help it, he sits down on the couch next to Hargrove and reaches out to run his fingers over one corner of the tape that hasn’t been smoothed out properly.

Hargrove sucks in a breath but waits until Steve is done before he smacks Steve’s hand away and snarls, “I’ve got it.”

“Yeah, you’ve got it.” His eyes dance over the bruises. “It’s really bad.”

Hargrove grabs his shirt and tries to quickly pull it over his head. “It’s fucking ugly, I know.”

“It must hurt.”

“I’m fine. It wasn’t so bad back in California. The weather’s always nice there. How’s Max?”

Steve doesn’t get the off-handed remark at first but as he’s opening his mouth to ask, it hits him. Warm weather means more revealed skin and less places where to strike without people noticing the abuse. It’s not his place to inquire about it, so he lets it slide. “She seemed okay. Very tired, though. She fell asleep in my room and I didn’t have the heart to wake her again.”

“Good, she’d be too drowsy tomorrow if she didn’t get a proper rest.”

“You know an awful lot of details about what she’s going through,” Steve says, keeping his tone light.

“So?” Hargrove’s voice comes out as a low growl.

“So, I came here downstairs to offer you the bed in the guestroom instead.” It would have been fine if Steve ended the sentence there but his mouth just had to go on to add, “Then I found you nursing

your wounds all by your lonesome.”

Hargrove has a split lip, there is a small scratch on his cheek – the blood has long dried – and his eyes look haunted. Some of his bruises are fading, light green to pale yellow, with faint traces of purple still lingering. There’s no way it’s all from today.

Hargrove is glaring daggers at him and Steve suddenly feels a little desire to talk about it as Hargrove does. “Hey, Hargrove,” Steve says, watches the way Hargrove’s jaw clenches in anticipation. “Where did you get my number?”

There are a few more seconds of tension before Hargrove uncoils, relaxing his shoulders and trying to appear nonchalant as he stretches out his legs and props them on the coffee table. “From your pal Tommy,” Hargrove says and there is more to the story, Steve knows that. Tommy would grill Hargrove about why he needs the number, he would taunt and mock and Steve doubts Hargrove would get an honest answer without beating it out of Tommy. Also, it would mean Hargrove would have had to ask Tommy for the number in advance, prior to the incident with Max getting involved. Now, Steve isn’t sure what was Max’s actual part in it but he knows for sure that there is no way Billy Hargrove would go around the school asking for the number to Steve’s house.

Steve just can’t see that happening. “You want me to believe that Tommy told you my number just because you asked him nicely?”

“Maybe I didn’t ask him nicely,” Hargrove drawls, cracking his knuckles.

Steve shakes his head and gives Hargrove a glare.

At the look Steve gives him, Hargrove amends, “Okay, okay. You got me there. He didn’t as much tell me as he might have scratched the number on the wall in the showers while I kept a lookout for any teachers,” Hargrove admits.

“So you what, memorized the number?” *Just in case?*

Hargrove shrugs, nonchalance itself. “It was hard to forget it. For a

good time, call... You never wondered why I call you *princess*?"

"Not really." It's just been something to add to the never ending list of stupid shit that Hargrove says.

"Why the heck not, you just thought I would call you that and mean it?"

Steve pretends to be surprised, widening his eyes and blinking slowly. "You didn't mean it..." Steve makes a small pause and watches, secretly amused, as Hargrove doesn't know what to say to that, "...as an insult?"

"You little shit!"

Hargrove goes for Steve's throat, either trying to get him into a chokehold or even trying to get a good squeeze on his windpipe, who knows. Steve sees it coming and rises his elbow in a quick jab to Hargrove's chest, aiming for one of the fading bruises he saw earlier.

Judging from the sharp intake of breath, Steve didn't miss. Hargrove lets go of him, twisting away, holding his side and grimacing. He reaches under his shirt and his fingers come out bloodied. "Damn it."

It's likely from the wound Hargrove didn't want him to help with. "Listen, your blood and this couch, that shouldn't mix," Steve says, standing up from the couch and waving at Hargrove to do the same. "Mum might be willing to overlook some things but there's no way in hell she doesn't notice if her couch looks like a murder scene."

Steve leads them to the hallway, ushering Hargrove up the stairs.

"What's the matter? I thought blood does it for you," Hargrove snipes.

"The blood and bruises are quite fine, it's the rest of the package that's rather off-putting," Steve teases.

Hargrove's fingers tighten around the handrail. He presses his lips together. No witty quip.

They pause at the top of the staircase and Steve lets Hargrove walk

first, waving his hand at the door to the guestroom. As Hargrove is moving past him, Steve's hand shoots out to connect to the small of Hargrove's back in a harsh poke. "What's the matter? Did I touch a sore spot?"

He isn't sure what he expects, maybe for Hargrove to whip around and shove him against the nearest wall and hit him hard, or maybe he expects to hear a pained yelp, but Hargrove only flinches, inhales through his clenched teeth, and continues walking.

Steve hurries up to catch with him before Hargrove could lock himself in the guestroom. He hates this mask of composure Hargrove puts on. He can see the cracks, can see how fake and wrong it is but he hasn't yet figured out how to make Hargrove take it down.

12. Chapter 12

“Nice,” Hargrove says curtly when he sees the guestroom.

There is a king size bed in the middle, two night stand tables at each side, a couple of wardrobes, a chest of drawers with a huge mirror sat on top of it. There is a painting above the bed, Steve isn’t familiar with the artist.

The potted plant by the window is fake.

It’s not much, Steve thinks. “Whatever. Take a seat on the bed, try not to make a mess.”

Hargrove eyes the bed. “Where are you going?”

“To get the antiseptic.”

When Steve comes back, Hargrove’s already settled down on the bed, shoes off, cross-legged, looking up at Steve with a wry smile on his face.

“Take the shirt off,” Steve tells him.

“Why, Steve, I didn’t know you c—”

“Shut up.”

Miraculously, Hargrove does shut up. Steve hands him some fresh gauze. “Here. Press this to the wound.”

Hargrove takes it from him, arching an eyebrow.

Steve waits for him to proceed before he moves to unwrap a bandage. He looks up, finds Hargrove watching him work. There is still some fresh blood at the small of his back. Steve makes a displeased sound, yanks the gauze from Hargrove’s hands and presses it to the wound himself.

“It won’t stop bleeding,” Steve complains, keeping his hand pressed against Hargrove’s side, making sure he has the whole length of the

cut covered.

It occurs to him that he's essentially hugging Hargrove, in his house, on the bed, while Hargrove's not wearing a shirt. Hargrove's letting him to it, eyes wide but expression unreadable. "Uh. Hold on," he stammers, grabbing Hargrove's hand and moving it into position to press against the gauze.

"It's soaking though," Hargrove comments in a calm tone, like it isn't his blood and his injury.

"Yeah, I know," Steve says, grabbing more gauze. "Here." He sits down, adding another layer to the gauze that Hargrove is holding. "No, no, don't take it off, just hold it all."

"Stop making a fuss, Harrington, I'm fine."

"Don't you dare move the gauze. Keep it pressed, I'm timing you. If you don't stop bleeding, I'm calling an ambulance."

"You do that and you're a dead man walking," Hargrove says darkly. He keeps the gauze in place, though.

The second layer doesn't bleed through, thank god. After a few silent minutes that Steve spends watching the wound while Hargrove stares at the ceiling, Steve clears his throat. "I'm going to get a towel to wash off the blood, okay?"

Hargrove shrugs. "Whatever, mom."

Steve jabs a finger into his shoulder. "Hey! I resent that." He's glad Hargrove haven't called him that around Max, she would make sure the kids never let him live it down.

Lightly wetting the towel under the tap in the bathroom, Steve returns to find Hargrove pulling the gauze away from his body. A few strings of the gaze got so soaked that they cling to the wound as the blood became dry.

Steve takes the gauze from Hargrove. "Let go. I've got it."

The muscle on Hargrove's back twitched as Steve pulls out the gauze

from the wound but Hargrove doesn't make any sound at all.

Steve washes the wound clean of the blood. "It's a bit red," he notes. He wishes he knew how old the cut was.

Hargrove hums.

"You don't have a temperature, do you?" He's reaching for Hargrove's forehead before he knows it.

Hargrove catches his hand and forcefully shoves it away. "What are you playing at, Harrington?!"

"Nothing." Steve runs a hand through his hair. "It would look bad if I had to explain to the cops what's your corpse doing in my house." He takes the wet towel to the sink to rinse it, then walks along the bed to hang it on the central heater under the window.

Hargrove has put the bandage on the wound by himself in the meantime. He climbed into the bed and is now lying down on top of the covers, watching Steve with his eyes half-closed.

Steve peers out of the window, watching for a while the ever moving shapes of the trees and their shadows. It has started to snow. Steve isn't surprised.

The sky is getting very light but it's going to be another cloudy day.

The snow is starting to linger on the ground. It's so cold it doesn't melt.

"Hey, would you look at that, your first snowfall here," Steve says, not bothering to turn around. "If there's enough snow, I'm going to get Max and the guys build a snow fort and there's nothing you can do about it. Except maybe joining us for a snowball fight." God knows they could use something fun and uncomplicated in their lives.

Hargrove is strangely silent, not even poking fun at Steve for being such a child. Steve chances a look over his shoulder and realizes Hargrove has fallen asleep. He watches his chest raise and fall for a moment, suspecting it is a trick and that Hargrove might try to retaliate the moment Steve lets his guard down.

“You asleep?” He murmurs softly.

He gets no answer, except for Hargrove’s deep, regular breathing.

Steve takes one step closer to the bed. “I’m not buying it, Hargrove, you can stop pretending now.”

Hargrove goes on breathing slow and steady, not saying anything at all. Steve would be inclined to believe the act, if his gut wasn’t telling him otherwise.

“You look almost nice when you’re not scowling or talking shit about people, you know that?”

Not even a twitch.

He inches closer. It’s deeply unsettling, not knowing if Hargrove’s asleep or not.

“You think it’s wise, keeping your eyes shut? How would you know if I were to attack you?”

He’s standing so close that his legs touch the side of the bed. Steve smirks. If this isn’t going to work, nothing will. Then he can rest assured that Hargrove’s really sleeping. “Last chance to admit you’re faking it, Hargrove, or else I’m kissing you good night.”

One second he’s watching Hargrove’s peaceful expression, watching closely for even the faintest quiver of the eyelashes, the next he’s met with Hargrove’s penetrating gaze. Steve’s heart speeds up.

“Like you would have the balls to do that,” Hargrove murmurs, eyes seeping into Steve’s.

Steve wavers just for a fraction of a second before leaning all the way down. He chickens out at the very last moment and drops a lightning quick kiss to Hargrove’s cheek, barely grazing the corner of his mouth. “Good night,” he mutters.

Hargrove’s eyes turn wide, expression completely stunned.

Steve flees from the room before Hargrove gathers his bearings.

13. Chapter 13

Steve doesn't get any sleep that night. It's not surprising. He barely sleeps on his good days and now that he half expects Hargrove to burst into the room any moment and tear him a new one, Steve can't even close his eyes.

Hargrove doesn't come to get him, though. From what Steve can hear, Hargrove doesn't even get up from the bed and sneak around the room. Steve would hear the floorboard creaking. Instead, the house is silent. Different kind of silent that to when Steve's the only one inside. He can't say exactly what is the difference but it is not the same at all.

Steve sits down on his desk, leans back against the wall, positioned so that he can see the sky growing lighter and lighter still. The occasional heavy snowflakes every now and then eventually turn into a steady snowfall.

From where he's sitting, he can't see the forest.

Finally, it's morning. A few hours after the daybreak, Max stirs. She first tosses from one side to the other, then a minute flash of pain crosses her face as she puts too much pressure on her arm.

It doesn't take long after that for her to fully wake up. "Steve?"

"Hey, Max. Good morning."

"Morning, Steve," Max says around a yawn, then she freezes. "How—"

"It's all right. Turns out it was just a tree branch smashing the window downstairs."

"But Billy said he saw it!"

"Look, Max. I don't know what he saw or what he thought he saw."

"You said—"

"Yeah, well. I didn't actually see anything, it's just this creepy feeling

I sometime get.”

Max gives him a sour look. It’s so close to one of Hargrove’s default expression that Steve has to suppress a smile.

“I still think we should tell the others, so they keep their eyes open.”

Steve nods. “Sure. That can’t hurt. How’re you feeling?”

“Better, actually,” Max says, sitting up and stretching. “Where’s Billy?”

“The guestroom.”

Max opens her mouth to say something but instead lets out another yawn that she tries to hide behind her hand.

“Let’s go downstairs, we can have breakfast,” Steve offers.

Max nods, rubbing at her eyes. She chucks down the glass of water Steve had put beside her bed. “Any news?” She points to the walkie talkie.

“Zilch,” Steve shakes his head. “You can try again, maybe someone will finally be up and listening now.”

“What time is it?”

“Still a bit too early. You can sleep in if you want.”

Max gets up from the bed. “No way. You promised me food.”

Steve shakes his head, smiling. “All right, all right. Come down when you’re ready.”

Max grabs the extra blanket from the bed and wraps it around her shoulders. “Sure.”

He hops off the desk, heads for the doors. “And Max?”

“Yeah?”

“Have you seen the snow outside?”

“What?!” She leaps to the window. “Whoa. That’s so awesome!”

“I was thinking we could get the gang ready for a snowball fight.”

“Steve,” Max says solemnly, “I approve of your ideas.”

Steve walks into the kitchen, puts on the kettle for some tea and gets the toaster ready. He has the fridge opened, looking for some milk, when he hears quiet steps on the kitchen tiles.

Steve grabs a carton of milk, sets it on the kitchen counter.

Hargrove is acting weird and shifty. He pauses far away at the window overlooking the driveway to the house, staring outside and avoiding Steve’s eyes. He doesn’t say hi and Steve doesn’t either. He isn’t sure what he could say after that. He has no excuses and no idea what came over him last night.

Steve opens the milk, butters the toasts, grabs the jam and pours the mugs of tea for them. Hargrove is oddly silent which lulls Steve into a false sense of security.

He nearly jumps out of his skin when Hargrove speaks up out of the blue. “Isn’t that your little nerd friend?”

Steve looks out of the window to where Hargrove is pointing to see Dustin trying to make it past the front gate.

The knife clutters to the kitchen counter as Steve rushes out to meet Dustin.

He pulls open the front door, immediately met with the icy cold wind.

Dustin lowers his bike to the ground and runs the remaining distance to the step of Steve’s house. “Steve!”

“Hey, Dustin,” Steve replies, bewildered.

“Steve! We need to get Max!”

“Get Max? What do you mean, get Max?”

“Yeah, hurry up, man, something’s wrong. Lucas went to check on her earlier but she’s not home—”

Steve gapes at the kid. “You went to her house?!”

“Yes! But she’s not there and she’s—”

“She’s upstairs,” Hargrove cuts in. He leans against the wall in the hallway, holding a mug of steaming tea in both of his hands. He blows gently into it, making the steam rise. “Come in, if you want to see her,” Hargrove drawls.

Dustin takes a step back. “Wh-what are *you* doing here?” He shakes his head, taking another step back. The snow crunches beneath his feet. Dustin turns to stare at Steve. “Steve? What’s he doing here?”

As Steve tries to find words that would placate Dustin, the boy continues to back away from the house. “Oh my god. This is his car parked over there. And there are no visible tracks in the snow. Oh my god, *ohmygod!*”

“Calm down!” Steve takes a step outside. The doorstep is freaking chilly. Hargrove continues to stand in the hallway, holding up his mug and watching them with an amused expression.

“So he’s been here since yesterday?!” Dustin continues to chatter. “Why, Steve? Why? I thought we were friends! And now you’re friends with *him*? Have you lost your mind? Have you forgotten how he *AAAAH!*”

Dustin sudden shriek attracts Max’s attention. She stomps downstairs, pushes past Hargrove and calls out, “Dustin?”

Dustin doesn’t register her at all. Which is weird, considering he came here because he was concerned about her and undoubtedly wanted to hire Steve for a quest to find her. Before he saw Hargrove, that is.

Max barrels through the door, shoving Steve aside. “What is it, Dustin?”

Dustin points into the freshly fallen snow. His hand is shaking.

Steve follows the indicated direction with his eyes and that's when he sees it.

Footprints in the snow.

Definitely not human.

14. Chapter 14

He hears the wind through the trees, softly whistling.

Steve rushes out of the house. He doesn't care about his feet getting cold, he doesn't care about the frosty air biting at his arms. All he can see is the indent in the snow.

Max is right there by his side, with Dustin shadowing them to get a close look. Max kneels down next to the paw print, hand hovering above it. Her hand looks small and fragile in comparison.

"Jesus," Dustin exhales. "There are so many of those."

"Is this what I think it is?" Steve wishes the evidence wasn't so glaringly obvious. He heard the noises, he felt the danger oozing from the forest. Everything was so hushed, holding its breath, trying not to make a sound that would attract the killer.

Hargrove saw it during the night, Steve didn't lie when he told Hargrove he believed him.

And now they can all see where the creature walked, where it stalked them, lurking just round the corner.

"Yeah, man. Fuck. Just look at them claws, *rrrr*," Dustin holds up his hand in a claw-like position.

"Demodogs don't have claws," Max objects.

Dustin lets his hand drop, balling it into a fist. "I know that."

"We should... we should get back inside," Steve tries, casting a cautious look around the garden. It can be anywhere. It can be prowling along the far back line of threes. It can be hiding beneath the low hanging branches. It can be about to attack and they're just standing there in the open without any way to defend themselves.

"I mean," Dustin says, peering down into the snow, "you can easily tell by the size of its paws that it's a huge one. See the way the set of marks is even on both sides? It was walking comfortably, without any

hurry.”

“The spacing is even,” Max agrees.

“We should follow the trail to see where it went.”

“No! We most definitely shouldn’t,” Steve interjects. “What we should do is getting back into the house.”

“Would be smarter to regroup and come back when we have a plan,” Dustin allows. “Good thinking, Steve.”

That’s not what Steve meant at all but hey, small victories. “Right. Let’s get back inside.” Before Hargrove realizes nothing is stopping him from slamming the front door in their faces and leaving them out there for the demodog to gnaw on.

“So the good news is that it is a demodog,” Dustin says.

“That’s the good news?!” Steve looks at the kid, trying to keep his mouth from falling open in disbelief.

“Yeah. We already know what we’re up against.” Dustin nods, giving him a toothy smile. “Plus, we have until the sunset to figure out how to gank them. Poor babies don’t like the sunshine.”

“Just let’s get back inside, Dustin.”

Hargrove is still standing in the hallway like nothing’s happened. He slurps tea from his mug, making obnoxious sounds.

Steve has to squeeze past him by walking sideways. It makes Hargrove smile.

“What?”

“Nothing,” Hargrove drawls, then jerks his chin to point outside. “What’s that?”

“The marks in the snow?”

Hargrove nods curtly.

“Probably from that thing you saw earlier.”

“From the, uh, demodog?”

Dustin, who is closing the door, goes still. His voice is barely a whisper. “He knows?”

Max puts an arm on his shoulder and makes a face. “Yeah.”

“He knows?! Are you – fuck this, you’re all crazy, people!” Dustin starts pacing.

Hargrove watches him with his big, focused eyes. He’s hiding his smirk behind that stupid mug with tea that he continues sipping, holding it with his both hands, fingers wrapped around it, as if he was too cold and was trying to soak as much warmth as possible.

Max kicks the door shut. “I’ll take him upstairs,” she whispers to Steve and then grabs Dustin and forces him to follow her.

“Try to get in touch with Lucas. If he’s still nosing around your house...” Steve trails off.

“Yes, sure. I’ll try to get him to come over here instead.”

“Sure.”

“It is cool with you, right?”

“Of course, Max.”

Hargrove doesn’t move from his spot in the hallway. With that stupid mug and that stupid smirk, Steve feels like punching him.

Dustin is still spluttering when Max drags him up the stairs. Their voices are beginning to fade when suddenly Steve hears Dustin burst out, “Of course we were worried!”

Their voices pick up volume again. Max is quieter but Dustin’s voice carries loud and clear.

“All we could hear was static! We thought something happened!”

“So you thought sending Lucas to go check on me in my house was a good idea? I told you to stay away from that house,” Max snaps back.

Hargrove slowly nods his head a few times, as if pleased that he taught Max well, and then he takes another slurp of his tea. Steve is glad Max is already upstairs and can't see her brother because he is sure she would punch Hargrove herself.

“Lucas went to get you, I biked here to see what's up with Steve. It would have helped if you were answering your walkie talkie, you know.”

“I don't have it here.”

“Lucas thought you were a goner, man,” Dustin huffs but his voice is getting quieter again. “We tried calling Steve but like I said, it was all static.”

There is a moment of silence, or perhaps they are talking in low voices now, Steve muses.

A few seconds later, Max's head appears on top of the staircase. “Steve?”

“Yeah?”

“Did you press the talk button and let it transmit through the night?”

Steve remembers taking the walkie from Max's hand and putting it on the night stand. “I might have?”

“You're an idiot, Steve!” Max bellows and with a swish of her hair she disappears into the bedroom, slamming the door.

“Hey!” Steve calls out but he's not really mad. Hell, they're all freaking out and trying to pretend they aren't freaking out. He can understand her behaviour.

“She's a charmer,” Hargrove quips.

“Shut up,” Steve mumbles. Hargrove's behaviour, on the other hand, he can't understand.

Author's Note:

Taking a short breaks guys, family issues.